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ABSTRACT

During Public School (PS) 115's 1969-70 academic year, a first-grade class of 27 disadvantaged, inner city youngsters received a special language arts program entitled Alpha One. Alpha One is a commercial initial reading program designed to teach first grade children to read and write sentences containing words of one, two and three syllables, and to develop and strengthen the child's self-esteem in terms of his language skills achievement. A control class of comparable first graders, instructed by an equally qualified and experienced teacher, used the school's regular reading program--the Stern Structural Reading Program. Both programs were selected to meet the special needs of the PS 115 youngsters, many of whom could not speak fluent English when they enrolled in school. At the end of the academic year, the two groups were compared on the Sentence Reading and Word Recognition subtests of the Gates Primary Reading Test. The Alpha One group scored significantly higher in both areas than the Stern group. At the end of the first grade, the Alpha One group was reading at better than the mid-second-grade level, while the Stern group was at about the norm. (Author/WR)

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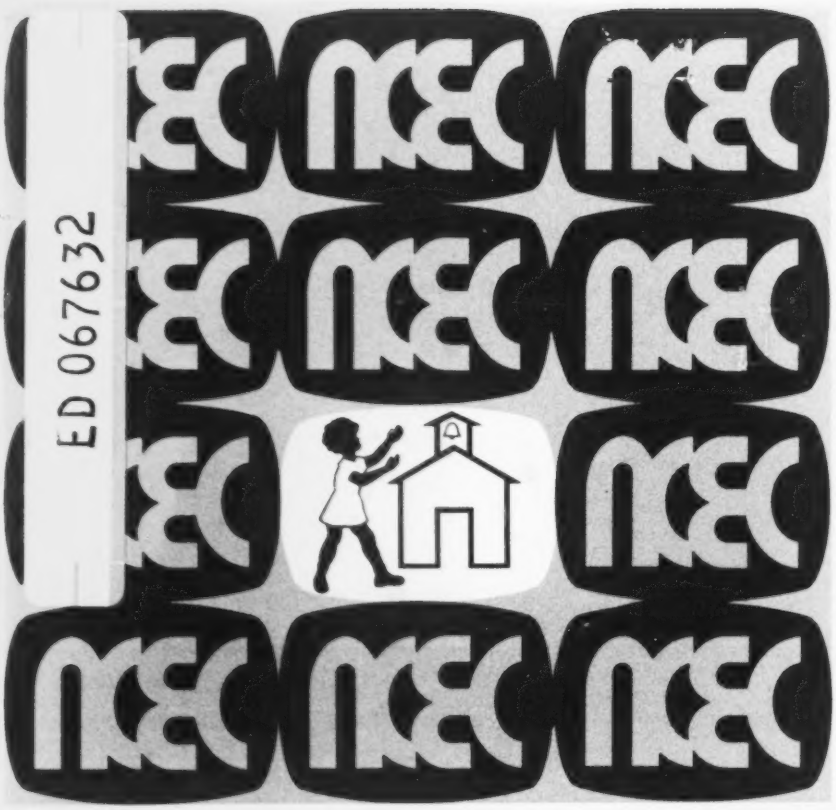

Model Programs
Compensatory Education

PS 115 Alpha One Reading Program
New York, New York

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Compensatory Education

PS 115 Alpha One Reading Program
New York, New York

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
Elliot L. Richardson, *Secretary*
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FOREWORD

This is the third in NCEC's *Model Programs* series, whose purpose is to inform educators about successful ongoing programs and to provide them with sufficient information to decide if locally modified replications would be desirable. Included in this series are descriptions of 15 "successful" compensatory education programs for disadvantaged children currently operating in the Nation's schools.

Under contract to the Office of Education, the American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences, Palo Alto, Calif., identified—through a literature search and nominations by local, State, and national educational agencies—over 400 candidate programs in this area. Of this number only 17 met the stringent criteria for success established by AIR in conjunction with OE. It should be noted that most of the programs rejected during the study were not rejected because they were demonstrated failures but rather because their evaluation methodology was so inadequate that a conclusion about success or failure could not be drawn.

Short descriptions of each program in the series have been prepared, covering such topics as context and objectives, personnel, methodology, inservice training, parent involvement, materials and equipment, facilities, schedule, evaluation data, budget, and sources for further information.

Six of the programs in this series were formerly written up in the *It Works* series published by OE in 1969. These six continue to operate successfully, as evidenced by the evaluation data; and since the *It Works* booklets are out of print, the program descriptions have been updated and included in this *Model Programs* series.

Two other programs—Programed Tutorial Reading Project, Indianapolis, Indiana, and Summer Junior High Schools, New York, New York—identified as exemplary compensatory education programs were included in the former *Model Programs* series on reading. Since these program descriptions are still available from the U.S. Government Printing Office, they were not republished for this series.

Two previous *Model Programs* series have been issued—on reading (10 programs) and childhood education (33 programs). Booklets on these programs are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402 for 15 to 25 cents each.

PS 115 Alpha One Reading Program
New York, New York

Overview

During Public School (PS) 115's 1969–70 academic year a first-grade class of 27 disadvantaged, inner city youngsters received a special language arts program entitled "Alpha One." Alpha One is a commercially available, initial reading program designed to (1) teach first-grade children to read and write sentences containing words of one, two, and three syllables, and (2) develop and strengthen the child's self-esteem in terms of his language skills achievement.

A control class of comparable first graders, instructed by an equally qualified and experienced teacher, used the school's regular reading program—the Stern Structural Reading Program. Both programs were selected to meet the special needs of the PS 115 youngsters, many of whom could not speak fluent English when they enrolled in school. The two classes used their respective reading program for three 40-minute periods a day throughout the school year.

Alpha One's game-like approach capitalizes upon the child's sense of fun and imagination to develop interest in learning to read and spell. Learning letter symbols and sounds, mastering rules of word formation, and reading and writing are byproducts of the interaction between the child and his 26 "Letter People" friends, his participation in creative and dramatic play, his enjoyment of activities associated with specially de-

veloped filmstrips and recorded stories and rhymes, and his programed success in a variety of visual and auditory discrimination "Letter People" games.

At the end of the academic year, the two groups were compared on the Sentence Reading and Word Recognition subtests of the Gates Primary Reading Test. The Alpha One group scored .74 grade-equivalent points higher in Sentence Reading and .57 grade-equivalent points higher in Word Recognition than did the Stern Group. These differences were found to be statistically significant. In terms of educational significance, at the end of the first grade, the Alpha One group was reading at better than the mid-second-grade level, while the Stern group was reading at about the norm.

The Gates Oral Reading Test was used to follow up a small but representative sample of the Alpha One children midway through second grade. Results indicated that the former Alpha One students were reading at fourth-grade level, or about 1.5 years above expectancy for nondisadvantaged children. It was therefore concluded that the rate of reading achievement growth displayed by the Alpha One children at the end of the first grade increased during the second grade, without the aid of further Alpha One instruction.

Description

Context, Objectives, and Personnel

PS 115 is located in a racially mixed inner city ghetto neighborhood of Manhattan. The school is housed in a 60-year-old, previously junior high school that was reopened as an elementary school in 1966, due to the pressing need for elementary classrooms. The 1966 enrollment was approximately 600. By 1971, the school's enrollment had more than doubled to serve approximately 1,400 students. The student body is constantly in flux, with approximately 1,000 children entering and leaving the school every year.

In association with local colleges, the school participates in several experimental education programs. The local colleges also send many student teachers to the school where their instructional techniques are reviewed by regular classroom teachers.

About 60 percent of the families in the neighborhood are on welfare, and nearly all the students in the school receive free lunches. The children are mostly of Dominican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Greek descent. When the school opened, many children in the lower elementary grades could not read or speak English. Added to this liability was an inexperienced teaching staff. The school therefore adopted the Stern Structural Reading Program, reasoning that its highly organized content and carefully prescribed methodology would be best suited to the combined needs of students and staff. Satisfied with the results produced by the Stern materials, but interested in innovation, the school's principal decided to pilot test the Alpha One reading program in one first-grade classroom during the 1969–70 academic year.

Alpha One, a 1–year language arts program for first graders, was developed by two elementary school teachers several years ago. The Alpha One program has been commercially available in kit form since 1969. The primary objectives of the program are (1) development of competency in listening, spelling, writing, and reading skills, and (2) development and strengthening of the child's self-esteem in his language skills achievement.

Alpha One classroom instruction is entirely the responsibility of one full-time teacher.

Methodology

Specific objectives.—Alpha One children are expected to be able to read and write sentences containing words of one, two, and three syllables by the end of the 1-year

program. The Alpha One reading curriculum is divided into three instructional modules. Specific objectives are associated with each of the three modules. The first module deals with the introduction of individual letters of the alphabet and focuses on the development of:

- Recognition of the letter shape and sound
- Oral reproduction of the letter sound
- Written reproduction of the letter symbol
- Association of the written symbol with the sound
- Recognition of the written symbol in isolation and in words
- Reading and spelling regular one-syllable words having a short vowel
- Introduction of blends and special letter combinations
- Alphabetization

The second module focuses on specific decoding and spelling skills, such as:

- Division of vowels and consonants
- Introduction of long vowels
- Differentiation of long and short vowel sounds
- Words that end with a long vowel sound
- Silent *e*
- Adjacent vowels
- Control of vowels
- Suffix *ing*
- Special sounds: *sh, ch, th, wh*
- Irregular sight words ("runaways")
- Distinction between *c* and *k*

- Y as a consonant and a vowel
- Soft c and g
- Special vowel sounds: *ou, oi, oo, au.*

The third module deals with decoding polysyllabic words. It provides the child with a practical means of attacking longer words.

Activities.—To accomplish its objectives, Alpha One uses a game-like phonics approach to decoding words. Heavy reliance is placed on the child's sense of fun and imagination to gain his involvement in learning to read and spell. The highly structured, carefully sequenced lessons are comprised of rhymes, humorous experiences, stories, and games.

The children are first introduced to the alphabet through 26 "Letter People"—five are girls (vowels) and 21 are boys (consonants). Each Letter Person is endowed with a memorable, alliterative characteristic which is associated with his letter sound. For example, Mr. M gets his sound from his "munching mouth," Mr. H gets his sound from his "horrible hair," and Mr. B gets his from his "beautiful buttons." Miss A is known by her "a-choo" and Miss I suffers from a terrible "itch." Later the children learn that the long sounds of the vowels are the same as their letter names.

Letters of the alphabet are introduced to the children one at a time, using procedures which incorporate special Alpha One materials (Letter People Placards, Letter Meeting Greeting Cards, Alphabet Sheets, Chatterbooks) and activities. These materials and methods are most easily described in connection with a lesson. For example, the first of four lessons on the letter T begins by telling the children they are about to meet a new Letter Person who needs an extra large toothbrush. A picture of an enormous toothbrush is sketched on the chalkboard. After the children speculate about the need

for the huge toothbrush, Letter Meeting Greeting Cards are distributed and a large Letter Person Placard for Mr. T is displayed. Both the individual cards and the large placard depict a cartoon of Mr. T showing his unusually "tall teeth." The children compare Mr. T's teeth to their own. (Mr. T's teeth are bigger. Mr. T's teeth take longer to brush. Mr. T's toothbrush would wear out first.) The children then compare the large cartoon placard of Mr. T with the cartoon replica on their own cards. The child's card depicts Mr. T with part of his body missing, in the outline of the letter T. The display placard, however, shows the complete cartoon with the letter T in bright red-orange. Discussion leads the children to discover that the part of Mr. T's body which is missing on their cards is the letter itself.

At this point, the Alphabet Sheets are distributed. The children rub their fingers over the outlined space for the letter *T* on their cards and describe its shape. (It goes up and down; it has straight lines, points, etc.) Then they look on their Alphabet Sheet for the letter that conforms to the outline on their card. As each child finds *T* he peels it off his adhesive-backed Alphabet Sheet and sticks it on his card, fitting the letter over the outline of Mr. T's missing part (letter).

Each child is then given an opportunity to say "tall teeth," stressing the alliterative *t* sound, and to think of other words which begin with Mr. T's sound. For such activities, each child may use his own Chatterbook, a special Alpha One activity book in which exercises begin with recognition of letters and their sounds, and grow increasingly complex as the child learns to decode words and to read illustrated sentences. Chatterbook activities for the lessons on Mr. T include coloring objects or checking pictures of objects which begin with Mr. T's sound, listening to the initial sound of words read aloud by the teacher and deciding if the word begins with Mr. T's sound, and so on. Chalkboard writing by a volunteer demonstrates how capital *T* is written. The rest of

the children practice writing *T* at their seats. Recognition and writing of small *t* proceeds as for big *T*. The first lesson on Mr. T concludes by eliciting the following observations from the children: "Mr. T has tall teeth. Mr. T gets his sound from tall teeth. Many objects start with the sound for T." Follow-on activities include drawing objects which begin with Mr. T's sound, drawing pictures of Mr. T brushing his tall teeth, collecting pictures of teeth and toothbrushes in individually kept notebooks, and accumulating objects beginning with *T* which are placed in Mr. T's special bag.

After all the Letter People have been introduced, Story Pictures (26 in all) are introduced. Each picture depicts the Letter People in action and deals with different instructional content, e.g., division of vowels and consonants; long vowels; sounds for c and *k*; soft *c* and *g*; special vowel sounds such as *oi, oo, ow*; etc. Short poems and longer stories accompany each Story Picture. Children are not asked to memorize rules of word formation. Instead, the stories and poems depict how the Letter People work together to form syllables and words.

Once the child learns Letter People sounds, he discovers that any answer he can "prove" is acceptable. He need no longer be concerned with one right answer. For example, a child is asked what Letter Person he hears starting the word *man*. The child responding correctly with "Mr. M" is told to "prove it" to the Letter Person. ("Mr. M starts man—man—munching mouth.") The child responding incorrectly with "Mr. N" would recognize his own error in the proving process. ("Mr. N starts man—man—noisy noise—oh, the Letter Person tricked me!") The child is allowed to try the proving process as many times as needed until he associates the proper Letter Person (Mr. M) with the beginning sound in *man*.

Every attempt is made to make the Letter People come alive for the children. A child may ask a Letter Person for a drink, and the Letter Person lets him go when he

hears the child say his special sound. ("Mr. V, vitamin starts like your velvet vest. May I get a drink?") At snack time, children offer to share with a Letter Person. Children may take a Letter Person to the library, gym, or park, where they get books for Mr. B, run with Mr. R, jump with Mr. J, and so on.

Other activities used to reinforce Alpha One lessons include dramatic play and child-operated puppets. A pink hand puppet is normally used for role playing the little girl vowels and a blue boy hand puppet is provided for acting out the consonants. Stories may be viewed on filmstrips which are included in the Alpha One kit. Additional stories and rhymes may be listened to on the long-playing phonograph record (Chatter Album). Individual chalk slates are used extensively during large group exercises.

No special textbooks are required for use in conjunction with the Alpha One kit. The children are encouraged to read anything they want to, regardless of difficulty level, including magazines, newspapers, and books. Any reading material that interests the child can be used in conjunction with Alpha One materials.

Instruction is individualized and monitored on the basis of weekly tests provided on 50 Duplicating Masters which are included in the kit. These tests, designed to evaluate specific lesson content, begin with simple identifications directed by the teacher and become progressively more difficult. The last three tests involve reading paragraphs and writing answers to questions. By this time the children read the directions without help from the teacher.

No special inservice training is provided in conjunction with Alpha One, nor is it felt to be necessary as long as the teacher follows the carefully prescribed lesson plans in the *Alpha One Professional Guide*. In the beginning, there is an individual lesson for each skill. Later units combine several skills into one lesson. Each lesson of each unit

is organized so that it can be adapted to the teacher's special skills. Suggested dialog for use with children is printed in italics as an aid to teachers using the program for the first time. Each page of the *Guide* has space reserved for notes, comments, or additions. Lesson plans are organized into the following categories:

- *Objectives* (General and Specific)—The overall aims of the lesson and the recommended methods by which these general aims are to be specifically realized.
- *Materials*—listed in the order in which they will be used.
- *Motivation*—recommended means of creating interest that lead into the development of the lesson.
- *Development*—typical means of developing a lesson include:
  (1) Discussion—child-child, child-teacher.
  (2) Chalkboard practice—spelling from dictation.
  (3) Chatterbook activity—directed and independent activities.
  (4) Puppet theater and dramatization—suggested plots and scripts related to the lesson.
  (5) Games—suggestions for games suitable for large or small groups.
  (6) Art activity—related craft and painting activities.
- *Medial Summary* (Quick Check)—a quick means for the teacher to check and survey her class' understanding of the lesson before proceeding.
- *Homework or Followup*—suggested activities for homework or for individual followup activity.
- *Summary*—a means of evaluating what has been learned.
- *Enrichment*—suggested activities to be used either with small groups that have special needs or with the whole class.
- *Testing and Evaluation*—provides a detailed analysis and instructions for the use of the Duplicating Master to evaluate the students' progress.

Prototypes of lessons which appear most frequently are given in detail at the beginning of the *Guide*. These include (1) Introducing Letter Meeting Greeting Cards; (2) Written Practice; (3) Chatterbook: Picture Selection, Letter Discrimination, Decoding; (4) Chalkboard Practice; and (5) Reading Sentences for Meaning.

A special section of the *Guide* contains 30 poems, which are used with lessons in Part Two of the *Guide* and the accompanying Story Picture. These poems are written in script form, which makes them ideal for dramatics and puppetry. There are also 20 stories about the Letter People which "rationalize their existence and behavior" (e.g., why Miss E gives up her sound at the end of her sisters' words; how Mr. Y became a part-time vowel). Twelve of these are recorded in the long-play Chatter Album.

Additional techniques for building self-esteem.—A great deal of time is invested in making certain that each child knows exactly what is expected of him and in programing experiences to guarantee his success in meeting lesson objectives. In addition, children are continually encouraged to feel proud of their progress. Games and activities allow the teacher flexibility in adjusting the demands made on a child to his individual capabilities. For example, in a game requiring a child to identify objects beginning with the sound of Mr. M, a child who selects a picture of a "tractor" is unobtrusively guided to justify his choice to Mr. M, perhaps by renaming it "machine." Or, if a child responds incorrectly when asked to give the sound of the letter, or when decoding a word, he is never told that he made a mistake. Instead, "Uh oh, Johnny, the Letter Person tricked you. . . ." Johnny is guided to "discover" an acceptable response. The child is gradually conditioned to perform for the Letter People instead of the teacher. He "proves" his responses to the Letter Person; he does not justify his answer to the teacher. "Right" is deemphasized in favor of changing the situation so that a child's best effort produces an appropriate and acceptable response. The justi-

fication for spending the time to create a "can't fail" atmosphere for language arts instruction is the assumption that such an atmosphere will help the child develop the courage and confidence to attack any word. Similarly, by substituting the colorful Letter People for 26 hieroglyphs which are traditionally learned by rote, and by endowing the Letter People with human frailties that the children have experienced or can recognize, Alpha One attempts to make language arts instruction appealing and enjoyable.

Daily schedule and classroom layout.—Three 40-minute periods are devoted to language arts each day, two periods during the morning and one period in the afternoon. The balance of the day is devoted to the rest of the first-grade curriculum: math, science (twice a week), social studies, physical education, and music (once a week). Some of these classes are taught by special subject-matter teachers. The adult-pupil ratio in the Alpha One class is 1:27. Except for the different reading programs, the Alpha One classroom is typical of first-grade classes. It has similar physical arrangements, materials, and equipment.

Contents of the Alpha One Kit.—Almost all of the following materials have been described in conjunction with explaining the games and activities used during Alpha One lessons. The contents are therefore listed below with little additional explanation:

- *Letter People and Symbol Cards:* 26 sturdy placards (14" x 16") each displaying a large cartoon of a Letter Person; 4 Symbol Charts to help decode words.
- *Story Pictures and Easel:* 26 scenes illustrated on 19" x 24" placards; the easel is designed to hold both Story Pictures and Letter People.
- *Letter Meeting Greeting Packets and Alphabet Sheets:* Each packet contains a pad of 35 Greeting Cards for each of the 26 letters.
- *Chatterbooks:* 35 individual activity books for decoding, reading, and spelling words.

- *Puppets and Stage:* Scripts, in verse, are also provided.
- *Chalkboards:* 35 individual reusable slates to be used for decoding and spelling.
- *Chatter Album:* 12", 33 1/3 rpm record which reinforces the learning of the vowel sounds and some of the basic lessons in the program.
- *Filmstrip:* Humorous episodes that reinforce identification of letters with personified characteristics.
- *Duplicating Masters:* 50 tests to aid the teacher in evaluating student work, and assignments children take home to demonstrate progress to their parents.
- *Professional Guide:* A detailed step-by-step lesson plan for each learning unit.
- *Alpha Wagon:* A container which houses the above materials, mounted on wheels for portability.

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Budget

In 1969-70, the Alpha One Reading Program cost $250, amounting to the cost of the classroom kit which contained materials sufficient for a class of 35. The estimated life expectancy for the complete Alpha One kit is 3 years. Three-year costs for the Alpha One program are shown below.

	Initial cost Year 1	Recurring cost Year 2	Recurring cost Year 3
Alpha One Reading Kit (Serves 35 children)	$ 250	$ 60	$ 60

The average cost for 3 years of Alpha One is $10.57 per pupil based upon a class of 35. This per-pupil cost is over and above the normal per-pupil cost for the regular school program.

Evaluation

The Alpha One reading program was introduced into one first-grade classroom at PS 115 in September 1969. The primary objective of the introduction was to compare the effectiveness of Alpha One to the regularly used Stern Structural Reading Program. This was the first formal attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of Alpha One when used with disadvantaged children.

The results of the evaluation show that at the end of the academic year the Alpha One group had a mean grade-equivalent reading achievement score of 2.68 in Sentence Reading and 2.95 in Word Recognition, while the comparison group had mean grade-equivalent scores of 1.94 and 2.38 in Sentence Reading and Word Recognition respectively. The Alpha group's mean Sentence Reading score was .74 grade-equivalent units higher than the control group, and their Word Recognition score was .57 grade-equivalent units higher than the comparison group. On the basis of a *t* test for independent groups, it was concluded that the Alpha One posttest means were significantly higher than the control group means on both subtests. Since the mean grade-equivalent posttest score of the Alpha One group at the end of the academic year was considerably greater than would be expected of nondisadvantaged children at the end of the first grade, it can be concluded that their reading achievement was educationally as well as statistically significant.

During January of 1971, the children who received the Alpha One program the previous year were administered the Gray Oral Reading Test to determine if their unusually high rate of reading achievement (1.34 months per month in Sentence Reading and 1.48 months per month in Word Recognition) at the end of the first grade would continue in the second grade when Alpha One materials were no longer used. Of the

27 children that were in the Alpha One program, 11 were available for a second reading posttest. The other students had either transferred to other schools or were unavailable for testing. The mean grade-equivalent reading score for those 11 students on the second posttest in January was 4.14. The expected or norm for nondisadvantaged children in January of the second grade is 2.5 in grade-equivalent units. The retested Alpha One group had a mean grade-equivalent achievement of 1.64 units above that expected of nondisadvantaged students tested at the same time. They were reading at the fourth-grade level at mid-second grade. It can be concluded, therefore, that the rate of reading achievement growth displayed by the Alpha One children at the end of the first grade increased during the second grade, without the further use of Alpha One materials.

In summary, the evaluation demonstrated the effectiveness of Alpha One reading materials when used with disadvantaged children. At the end of the first grade Alpha One children were reading at better than the mid-second-grade level, at mid-second grade they were reading at the fourth-grade level. The Alpha One reading program, although originally designed for the nondisadvantaged children, appears to be very effective when used to teach disadvantaged children to read.

Modifications and Suggestions

The most emphatic suggestion made by the program developers to teachers who plan to use the Alpha One reading materials is to focus on the process. The product—listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills—will automatically follow. The process, as has been noted, is delineated in lesson plans contained in the *Professional Guide*. Although the new teacher may feel more secure following the plans to the letter, the

Guide encourages the more experienced teacher to use the plans as reference points, embellishing the essential Alpha One process with motivational techniques developed through her unique experience. If there is an Alpha One motto, say the developers, it is, "Make the program live for the children."

Alpha One readers will be available in 1972. The readers have been sequenced so that their stories complement the lessons in the Alpha One series and expand and apply these lessons. The stories concern the Letter People and their humorous, sad, or familiar situations and predicaments. Each story, as in the basic Alpha One program, is accompanied by a step-by-step lesson plan. The teacher's edition of each reader in the series contains behavioral outcomes for each story-lesson and activities by which these outcomes may be validated. The outcomes have to do with word attack skills, word recognition, spelling, vocabulary and language development, comprehension, interpretative skills, and so on.

Sources for Further Information

For information regarding the Alpha One program at PS 115, contact:

Mr. Lawrence S. Finkel, Principal
PS 115
586 West 177th Street
New York, New York 10033
(212) 795-4758, -4759

For information regarding the development of the Alpha One program, contact:

Mrs. Elayne Reiss
c/o New Dimensions in Education, Inc.
131 Jericho Turnpike
Jericho, New York 11753

Materials

Alpha One: Breaking the Code (the complete classroom kit) may be ordered from:

New Dimensions in Education, Inc.
131 Jericho Turnpike
Jericho, New York 11753

In addition to distributing the Alpha One kits, New Dimensions will also supply films showing the program in action:

"By Gosh She's Got It"
A CBS "60 Minute" Film
A "Today Show" Film

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MODEL PROGRAMS—Compensatory Education Series

Fifteen promising compensatory education programs for the disadvantaged are included in this series. Following is a list of the programs and their locations:

College Bound Program, New York, N.Y.

Diagnostic Reading Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio

The Fernald School Remediation of Learning Disorders Program, Los Angeles, Calif.

Higher Horizons 100, Hartford, Conn.

The Juan Morel Campos Bilingual Center, Chicago, Ill.

Learning to Learn Program, Jacksonville, Fla.

More Effective Schools Program, New York, N.Y.

Mother-Child Home Program, Freeport, N.Y.

Preschool Program, Fresno, Calif.

Project Conquest, East St. Louis, Ill.

Project Early Push, Buffalo, N.Y.

Project MARS, Leominster, Mass.

Project R-3, San Jose, Calif.

PS 115 Alpha One Reading Program, New York, N.Y.

Remedial Reading Laboratories, El Paso, Texas

Two programs also identified for this series were described in the *Model Programs—Reading* series: Programed Tutorial Reading Project, Indianapolis, Indiana, and Summer Junior High Schools, New York, New York. Since these program descriptions are still current and available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, they were not rewritten for this series.

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